

U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/708,737  
Response filed September 29, 2005  
Reply to OA dated June 30, 2005

**AMENDMENTS TO THE DRAWINGS:**

The attached sheet of drawings includes changes to FIG. 1. The attached sheet of drawings replaces the original sheet including FIG. 1. The legend "PRIOR ART" has been added to FIG. 1.

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**REMARKS:**

Claim 1-4 are currently being examined, of which claims 2-4 have been amended herein.

Applicants and Applicants' attorney thank Examiner Kastler for the interview courteously granted September 1, 2005. The special attention the Examiner paid to the subject application is noted with appreciation. Items discussed during the interview include: claim 1 of the subject application; the Office Action dated June 30, 2005 and the objections and rejection set forth therein; and proposed amendments of claims 2-4.

The Examiner has objected to the drawings. In particular, the Examiner has suggested that a legend such as "prior art" should be added to Fig. 1. Accordingly, the legend "prior art" has been added to Fig. 1. Thus, Applicants respectfully submit that this objection should be withdrawn.

The Examiner has objected to claims 2-4 as being of improper dependent form for failing to further limit the subject matter of a previous claim. Claims 2-4 have been amended in a manner intended to overcome this objection. Thus, Applicants respectfully submit that this objection should be withdrawn.

Claims 1-4 stand rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as anticipated by alleged admitted prior art (Fig. 1 and paragraphs [0003]-[0009]).

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Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

The Examiner has suggested that the alleged admitted prior art (Fig. 1; paragraphs [0003]-[0009]) teaches “a continuous vacuum carburizing furnace including a heating/‘first conditioning’ chamber.”

Thus, the Examiner is suggesting that the heating chamber 2 (shown in Fig. 1) anticipates “a heating chamber for heating a workpiece under a atmospheric pressure; a first conditioning chamber in which the pressure is reduced from the atmospheric pressure after the receipt of the workpiece from the heating chamber” of claim 1.

However, Applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner because claim 1 sets forth “a first conditioning chamber in which pressure is reduced after the receipt of the workpiece from the heating chamber.”

This claim language indicates that the “first conditioning chamber” can be distinguished from the heating chamber, because the workpiece is received from the heating chamber.

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In view of the above, the single chamber ("heating chamber 2") (Fig. 1, paragraphs [0003]-[0009]) does not describe, teach, or suggest the following two chambers: the "heating chamber" and "first conditioning chamber" as set forth in claim 1.

The alleged admitted prior art (Fig. 1 and paragraphs [0003]-[0009]) fails to describe, teach, or suggest the following features set forth in claim 1: "a heating chamber for heating a workpiece under a atmospheric pressure; a first conditioning chamber in which the pressure is reduced from the atmospheric pressure after the receipt of the workpiece from the heating chamber", in combination with the other claimed features.

Thus, Applicants respectfully submit that this rejection should be withdrawn.

In view of the aforementioned amendments and accompanying remarks, it is respectfully submitted that all claims currently being examined are in condition for allowance, which action, at an early date, is requested.

If, for any reason, it is felt that this application is not now in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact Applicants' undersigned attorney at the telephone number indicated below to arrange for an interview to expedite the disposition of this case.

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In the event that this paper is not timely filed, Applicants respectfully petition for an appropriate extension of time. Please charge any fees for such an extension of time and any other fees which may be due with respect to this paper, to Deposit Account No. 01-2340.

Respectfully submitted,

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PATENT TRADEMARK OFFICE

Enclosure: Replacement Drawings (Fig. 1)